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SUBJECT: Belgian Appraisal of Soviet Pavilion Propaganda

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A leading front-page article in the Brussels daily La Libre Belgique of August 21, 1958, titled "Russian Colonialism at the Brussels Exposition," exposes the rigid imperialism that underlies the Soviet pretense of representing a federated union of "sovereign and independent" republics. The article begins by pointing out that of the more than 16 million visitors to the Soviet Pavilion, only 3,000 have been Soviet nationals, "minutely chosen and supervised." It then goes on to remark that one particular aspect of the Soviet presentation eludes the mass of visitors from the western world, namely, the absence at the Pavilion of the non-Russian nations of the U.S.S.R. -- "an absence desired by the Russians, for reasons that are mainly political."

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The article then draws attention to the fact that the 15 flags of the republics that constitute the U.S.S.R., prominently displayed at the entrance to the Pavilion, are meant to convey the propaganda message of a "happy family" of small nations joined in a single State. But inside the great hall of the Pavilion, where two rows of cabinets contain inscriptions in the language and writing of each republic, none of these inscriptions has been translated or explained either in French or Flemish or in any other language that might be widely understood. "Everything indicates" says the writer, "that this omission was not made by chance."

If any visitor should happen to ask for a book in Ukrainian at the Soviet Pavilion (according to the writer), "the personnel would regard him with suspicion, if not with irritation." On the other hand, all the books in Russian, both scientific and literary, are displayed in mass. The writer then stresses the cultural, political, and economic importance of the Ukraine, with more than 42 million inhabitants. Mentioning some of the other Soviet Republics, he observes, "All these republics -- representing more than 100 millions of non-Russian peoples -- are dispersed, camouflaged, diluted and lost in the Soviet Pavilion... The traces of the existence of these peoples are so skillfully effaced that Russia emerges alone among all the others, who are reduced to the rôle of supernumeraries or of folkloristic performers."

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The article then mentions the presence of the "Ukrainian Ensemble of Song and Dance" at the Brussels Exposition as "a unique exception" to the Soviet policy of repressing non-Russian cultural manifestations, and attributes this exception to political pressure. It also observes that no delegate of the Ukrainian Government accompanied the group to Brussels or represented it at the Exposition. And it adds that Mr. Vorochilov did not bring "a single minister of a single non-Russian Soviet Republic" to participate in the "National Days" of the U.S.S.R.

Drawing his conclusions, the author writes: "When one compares these so-called independent Soviet Republics with the British 'dominions', or the French 'mandates,' one realizes that the latter enjoy much more independence and liberty than the Ukraine, Bielo-Russia, Georgia, Lithuania, etc." He then proceeds to unmask the Soviet propaganda: "In the Soviet propaganda, the slogans of self-determination of peoples, of national liberty and equality, serve only as export items and as a screen behind which is hidden the old Czarist imperialism disguised as a Soviet conqueror."

In his final paragraph, the writer maintains that the nations of the Soviet Union are struggling, not merely to change the regime, "but above all to liberate themselves from the militaristic imperialism that this regime imposes upon them."

This article is considered especially significant, because it reveals the extent to which the Belgians can see through the smoke-screen of blatant propaganda that envelops the Soviet presentation at the World's Fair, and the cogency with which some leading journalists are exposing this propaganda to the Belgian public.

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Enclosure:

Clipping (single copy) "La Libre Belgique", August 21, 1958

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